

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6820
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MANAGUA 2671

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, PINS, PGOV, PINT, NU
SUBJECT: POLITICAL UPDATE

SUMMARY: DURING THE PAST MONTH, POLITICAL POSITIONS IN NICARAGUA REMAINED BASICALLY IN THE HIGHLY FLUID AND INCOHERENT SITUATION WHICH HAS CHARACTERIZED THE COUNTRY SINCE THE ASSASSINATION OF PEDRO JOAQUIN CHAMORRO IN JANUARY. THERE IS NO END IN SIGHT TO THIS SITUATION

DESPITE MINI-MOVES TOWARD REFORM, ORGANIZATION, INSURRECTION, REPRESSION AND DIALOG. THE GENERAL CHARACTERIZATION OF THE SCENE BY PRO-GON POLITICAL OBSERVERS IS OPTIMISTIC, WHILE RESPONSIBLE OPPOSITIONISTS SEE A DETERIORATION TOWARDS INSURRECTION AND/OR REPRESSION.

1. THE FOLLOWING ANALYSIS IS INTENDED TO CHARACTERIZE WHERE NICARAGUA STANDS AND, IS HEADED, AND THE ATTENDANT IMPLICATIONS FOR US POLICY. DURING THE PAST MONTH, THE FREEZE ON US DEVELOPMENTAL ASSISTANCE AND FMS CREDITS (ALBEIT FOR NON-MILITARY ITEMS) WAS BROKEN. THIS NEWS WAS PRAISED BY SOMOZA AND RECEIVED WITH DISMAY BY OPPOSITIONISTS DESPITE THE BEST EFFORTS OF THE EMBASSY TO PLACE IT IN CONFIDENTIAL

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TEXT. DESPITE ALL ATTEMPTS TO MAINTAIN A LOW PROFILE AND CHARACTERIZE US POLICY AS BASICALLY NEUTRAL, WHILE ENCOUFAGING DEMOCRATIZATION, WE REMAIN IDENTIFIED BY ALL LOCAL SECTORS AS A KEY POLITICAL ACTOR, WHOSE EVERY WORD AND ACTION IS SUBJECT TO VARYING INTERPRETATION DEPENDING ON THE POLITICAL VIEWPOINT OF THE LOCAL ANALYST.

2. THE GON, AND SOMOZA IN PARTICULAR, CONTINUE TO CHARACTERIZE US POLICY IN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC AS UNFAIRLY BIASED AGAINST THE GON. THIS IS TRUE DESPITE THE ATTEMPT OF THE GON TO PUBLICLY DESCRIBE THE THAW IN DEVELOPMENTAL ASSISTANCE AS A RETURN TO THE STATUS QUO ANTE. AT

THE SAME TIME, SOMOZA WAS SAYING THAT NICARAGUA COULD NO LONGER COUNT ON ITS TRADITIONAL ALLIES FOR SUPPORT AGAINST THE CUBAN-BACKED COMMUNIST THREAT. HE SAID HE COULD LIVE WITHOUT THAT SUPPORT BY REINFORCING THE NATIONAL GUARD (GN) AND DIVERSIFYING MILITARY PROCUREMENT.

THE OPPOSITION, MEANWHILE, WAS INTERPRETING THE THAW IN ASSISTANCE AS A REVERSAL IN THE US HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY AND OVERT SUPPORT FOR SOMOZA. THIS WAS MADE ESPECIALLY CLEAR IN STATEMENTS BY UDEL PRESIDENT RAFAEL CORDOVA RIVAS. EVEN THOUGH IT GAVE SPACE TO CORDOVA'S CRITICISM, THE OPPOSITION NEWSPAPER, LA PRENSA, WHICH ORIENTS OPPOSITIONISTS, WAS RELATIVELY MODERATE IN ITS REPORTAGE OF THIS CHANGE IN POLICY APPLICATION, PROBABLY BECAUSE OF EMBASSY EFFORTS TO PUT THE MATTER IN PERSPECTIVE. THE GON ORGAN, NOVEDADES, ACCEEDED ONLY PARTIALLY TO SIMILAR EMBASSY EFFORTS TO URGE MODERATION OF ITS STANDARD PRACTICE OF PROTRAYING SUCH AN EVENT AS A VICTORY FOR THE GON. THE MESSAGE THAT THE RELEASE OF FUNDS WAS NOT INTENDED TO SUP-

PORT SOMOZA WAS NOT GIVEN PUBLICITY BY LOCAL MEDIA.

3. A SECONDARY PROBLEM OF IMAGE FOR THE US WAS THE "MERCENARY" ISSUE. THE TWO OR THREE GRINGO ADVISORS TO THE GN WERE SIGHTED IN WHAT APPEARED TO BE AN OPERATIONAL AS OPPOSED TO A TRAINING ROLE. THE AMBASSADOR'S DEMARCH TO SOMOZA RESULTED IN A FURTHER PROMISE TO CONFIDENTIAL

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TAKE CORRECTIVE MEASURES. SINCE THE, THERE HAVE BEEN NO REPORTED PUBLIC SIGHTINGS OF THE ADVISORS ALTHOUGH EMB UNDERSTANDS THEY HAVE NOT BEEN GIVEN THEIR MARCHING ORDERS.

4. POLITICALLY, EVENTS HAVE REMAINED AT A VIRTUAL STAND-STILL. SOMOZA HAS MADE SOME EFFORT TO SEDUCE THE OPPOSITION INTO A DIALOG, BUT THE OPPOSITION REMAINS WARY OF DIALOG BECAUSE OF SOMOZA'S TRADITIONAL WILINESS, THE INHERENT WEAKNESS OF A FACTIONALIZED OPPOSITION, THE TRADITION THAT DIALOG HAS RESULTED IN PACTS PERMITTING DYNASTIC "CONTINUISMO", HOPES THAT THE INSURRECTINIST ROUTZ WILL EVENTUALLY SUCCEED IN FORCING SOMOZA TO LEAVE AND FEAR OF LEFT-WING EXTREMISTS WHO THREATEN VIOLENCE AGAINST ANYONE WHO DIALOGS WITH SOMOZA. TWO OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY FACTIONS HAVE REACHED AN UNDERSTANDING FOR COOPERATIVE ACTION, BUT EMILIO ALVAREZ MONTALVAN, THE CHIEF PROMOTER OF A REUNIFIED CONSERVATIVE PARTY, REMAINS THWARTED IN HIS INITIATIVES

WITH THE TWO CHIEF SEGMENTS OF THE PARTY, E.E., THE OFFICIAL CONSERVATIVES AND FERNANDO AGUERO'S FACLUON WHICH CLAIMS TO BE THE OFFICIAL PARTY. THERE HAS BEEN A MOVEMENT TOWARDS A BROAD OPPOSITION FRONT (FAO), BUT, TO DATE, ITS ACTIVITY HAS REFLECTED THE PROBLEMS OF SUCH A FRONT, I.E., IT HAS DEMANDED AN IMMEDIATE SOMOZA DEPARTURE AND HAS BLESSED THE FSLN, BUT IS UNWILLING TO ORGANIZE ITSELF TO TAKE

PARTY IN PARAMILITARY ACTION AS WITNESSED BY ITS DECISION TO NOT INVITE PARTICIPATION OF THE 12 WHICH WOULD CONSTITUTE A SYMBOLIC OPENING IDENTIFYING THE FAO WITH THE FSLN.

5. THE FSLN, IN ALL ITS FACTIONS, HAS REMAINED RELATIVELY DORMANT SINCE THE FEBRUARY ATTACKS, OTHER THAN ONE OR TWO BANK ROBBERIES FOR WHICH THEY MAY HAVE BEEN RESPONSIBLE AND/OR CLAIMED CREDIT, AND VARIOUS STUDENT AND OTHER DISTURBANCES FOR WHICH THEY MAY HAVE BEEN RESPONSIBLE. THE NEXT, AND ALL-OUT, ATTACK OF THE TERCIARIO FACTION OF THE FSLN, LONG RUMORED FOR MAY OR JUNE, HAS NOT TAKEN PLACE, THEREBY GENERALLY WEAKENING ITS POSITION, ESPECIALLY IN THE EYES OF THE GON, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME NARROWING THE TIME FRAME WITHIN WHICH IT MUST ACT TO RETAIN CREDIBILITY.
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6. DISTURBANCES, BOTH SPONTANEOUS AND DIRECTED, HAVE CONTINUED TO OCCUR AMONG STUDENTS, WORKERS, CAMPESINOS, AND UNIVERSITY PERSONNEL. MINOR MARXIST-LENIST GROUPS (IE. EN FER, ETC.) ARE THE SALIENT ORGANIZERS. THE MOST SERIOUS INCIDENT WAS RIOTING IN ESTELI, IN WHICH SOMOZA RELATED ENTERPRISES OR SUPPORTERS BECAME THE TARGET FOR A MILLION DOLLAR PLUS ARSON ATTACK, REPORTEDLY LARGELY BY YOUTH. THE RESULT WAS THE REPLACEMENT OF THE GN COMMANDER WHO HAD A REPUTATION FOR BEING ACCOMMODATING TO THE POPULACE. THERE WERE ALSO VARIOUS MINOR STRIKES FOR LARGELY POLITICAL MOTIVES, THE MOST SIGNIFICANT OF WHICH WAS BY NATIONAL UNIVERSITY (UNAN) WORKERS AND PROFESSORS. A SENIOR UNAN OFFICIAL PRIVATELY SAID THE STRIKE WAS MOTIVATED BY A DESIRE TO LEVEL ALL INCOMES OF UNAN PERSONNEL AND TO INSIST ON PLANING FOR A NEAR TERM REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT WHICH WOULD ALLOW THE UNIVERSITY TO RECEIVE GREATER BUDGETARY SUPPORT FROM A NEW REGIME. THESE ACTIVITIES ALSO INDICATED SOCIAL REVOLUTIONARY FERMENT. THE DISPUTE WAS SETTLED IN EARLY JUNE FOLLOWING A LA PRENSA ANALYSIS THAT THE STRIKERS WERE PLAYING INTO THE HANDS OF THE GON.

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7. REGARDING THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION, GN ORDERS FOR RESTRAINT APPEAR TO REMAIN UNCHANGED, HOWEVER, THE GN HAS MOVED

MORE RAPIDLY TO BREAK UP STUDENT OCCUPATIONS OF SCHOOLS. RECURRING REPORTS OF GN BRUTALITY ARE AIRED AND THERE ARE TO SERIOUS CASES: IN MASAY, FOLLOWING THE EXPLOSION OF A HOME-MADE BOMB, STUDENTS WHO HAD BEEN CHANTING ANTI-GON SLOGANS WERE DISPERSED BY THE GN. TWO STUDENTS WERE WOUNDED IN THE LEGS BY SHOTS THAT OBVIOUSLY WERE NOT INTO THE AIR. IN ANOTHER CASE (TO BE REPORTED SEPTEL, A PERSON RECENTLY TAKEN PRISONER IN MANAGUA FOR A COMMON CRIME DIED IN A JAIL REPORTEDLY OF INTERNAL INJURIES. TORTURE WAS ALLEGED BY OTHER PRISONERS. INVESTIGATIONS WERE LAUNCHED BY THE GN IN BOTH OF THESE CASES. THE CAPUCHINE PRIESTS HAVE ISSUED A NEW LIST OF DISAPPEARED CAMPESINOS FOR WHICH THEY DO NOT PERSONALLY VOUCH AND WHICH APPEARS TO REFER MAINLY TO THE 1975-76 PERIOD. THEY ALSO REPORT THE REAPPEARANCE OF ONE MORE PERSON WHOSE NAME IS ON THEIR OLD LIST (ALSO SEPTEL. ONE DISAPPEARED PERSON IDENTIFIED IN THE PERMANENT HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION'S (CPDH) ANNUAL REPORT AS DISAPPEARED (CASTILLO) IS IN CUSTODY AND AWAITING TRIAL. CONTROL OF THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA WAS EXERCISED MORE SEVERELY THAN BEFORE IN THE CASE OF FIVE RADIO STATIONS

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CLOSED FOR SEVERAL HOURS FOLLOWING REPORTS OF THE RIOTING IN ESTELI. THE DIRECTOR, OF RADIO AND TV, COL. LUNA, ADMITTED TO EMBOFF HE HAD MADE A MISTAKE IN THE CASE OF ONE OF THOSE STATIONS (RADIO CORPORACION) AS IT HAD BEEN BROADCASTING ONLY THE FACT THAT DISTURBANCES WERE OCCURRING AND NOT LIKE THE OTHERS, THAT A GENERAL UPRISING WAS TAKING PLACE. THERE HAS BEEN NO DEVELOPMENT ON THE OUTSTANDING PETITIONS FOR INFORMATION FROM THE GN REGARDING "DISAPPEARED" CAMPESINOS AND NO CASES IN WHICH ACTIVE GN HAVE BEEN FOUND GUILTY OF ABUSE OR CRIMES. THE ICRC HAS BEEN ADMITTED FOR A PRELIMINARY VISIT TO JAILS, BUT HAS NOT YET RETURNED FOR MORE WIDESPREAD INSPECTIONS. THE GON MAY BE PREPARING FOR AN IAHRIC INSPECTION, BUT TO DATE, THIS IS FAR FROM CLEAR. INSTEAD, THE GON HAS BEEN TRYING TO DISCREDIT THE NICARAGUAN CPDH AS POLITICALLY MOTIVATED. AT THE SAME TIME, SOMOZA HAS PUBLICLY CRITICISED THE US HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY AS FOMENTING COMMUNIST SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES. HE ALSO PUBLICLY AGREED WITH THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION'S HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY BUT HAS TAKEN EXCEPTION TO ITS APPLICATION IN NICARAGUA. MOST IMPORTANTLY, AS THE SCENT OF GN-CIVILIAN CONFRONTATION HAS CHANGED IN THE PAST YEAR FROM THE COUNTRYSIDE (WHERE THE CONFLICT LED TO THE REPORTS OF DISAPPEARED CAMPESINOS) TO THE CITIES, THE INSTANCES OF BRUTALITY AND INDISCRIMINATE USE OF FORCE HAS BECOME MUCH MORE VISIBLE. THIS, PLUS THE FACT THAT NOTHING HAS BEEN DONE TO INVESTIGATE AND BRING TO JUSTICE THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE EARLIER DISAPPEARANCES, LEADS TO THE BELIEVE AMONG HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS AND ANTI-SOMOZA ACTIVIST (GROUPS WHICH LARGELY OVERLAP) THAT THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION HAS WORSENERED. IN THE LIGHT OF THIS ANY USG STATEMENTS ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION MUST BE CAREFULLY PLANNED.

8. SOMOZA AS YET HAS MADE NO FURTHER CONCESSION WHICH WOULD LEAD THE OPPOSITION TOWARD A DIALOG. MOST OF HIS ACTIONS HAVE BEEN PROMISES RATHER THAN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES. THESE PROMISES

HAVE BEEN CONDITIONED ON THE OPPOSITION ENTERING A DIALOG. SOMOZA
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COMPLAINS ABOUT OPPOSITION INTRANSIGENCE AND THE OPPOSITION CONTINUES TO SEE SOMOZA AS DETERMINED TO PERPETUATE THE DYNASTY. THE OPPOSITIONISTS FOCUS ON MAJ. "TACHITO" SOMOZA'S INCREASING INFLUENCE, THE INCREASED PUBLICITY OF HIS ACTIVITIES BY NOVEDATES, AND THE FACT SOMOZA'S INITIATIVES TO DATE DO NOT REPRESENT ANY CONCESSION OF REGIME POWER OR WILLINGNESS TO ADOPT NEW RULES OF THE GAME WHICH ARE NECESSARY FOR THE OPPOSITION TO BELIEVE IN THE POSSIBILITY FOR DEMOCRATIC CHANGE. SOMOZA DID DIRECTLY INVITE THE OFFICIAL CONSERVATIVE OPPOSITION TO PRESENT ITS POINT OF VIEW ON THE CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM TO OPEN UP ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION OF THIRD PARTIES. SOMOZA ALSO, IN EARLY JUNE DURING THE CONGRESSIONAL RECESS, AMENDED LAW TO MANDATE THE 13TH MONTH BONUS FOR ALL WORKERS. AN EXTRADITION REQUEST WAS SENT TO THE US FOR AN ALLEGED "INTERNATIONAL AUTHOR" OF THE CHAMORRO ASSASSINATION (PEDRO RAMOS). BUT, AS LA PRENSA HAS INDICATED, THE LEGAL PROCEEDINGS IN THE ASSASSINATION LEAVE MANY IMPORTANT STONES UNTUNED, AND THE GENERAL PERCEPTION IS OF A GON "COVERUP" DESIGNED TO PROTECT POWERFUL GON OFFICIALS. THE OPPOSITION CONTINUES TO BELIEVE SOMOZA'S MOVES ARE TOKEN GESTURES DESIGNED TO UY OFF THE US RATHER THAN MEET NICARAGUAN POPULAR DEMANDS FOR JUSTICE AND DEMOCRATIC CHANGE.

9. DEVELOPMNTS IN THE ROLE OF THE NICARAGUAN CATHOLIC CHURCH HAVE BEEN

GENERALLY NEGATIVE. IT IS DISTURBED BY THE APPERANCE OF A DETERIORATING SITUATION WHICH IMPLIES NO END TO FURTHER VIOLENCE AND THE CASES OF SEVEN FOREGIN PRIESTS DENIED RE-ENTRY. FIVE WERE SUBSEQUENTLY

ALLOWED RE-ENTRY. AMONG THE TWO PERMANENTLY EXLUCDE WAS ONE US CITIZEN. THIS SITUATION AND THE PEDRO JOAGUIN AND "PECHE" CHAMORRO MURDER LED ARCHBISHOP OBANDO TO SAY, ON HIS RETURN FROM THE VATICAN, THAT LIFE IN NICRAGUA WAS NOT WORTH A CENTAVO. OBANDO APPARENTLY WANTS

TO BE CONSTRUCTIVE BUT APPARENTLY SEES NO WAY TO BE SO AS LONG AS IT MEANS PUBLICLY DEALING WITH, OR ENCOURAGING OPPOSITIONISTS TO DEAL WITH, SOMOZA. HE FEELS THAT KEY OPPOSITIONISTS ARE STILL COMMITTED TO INSURRECTION AND THAT ONLY AFTER A POSSIBLE BLOOD BATH WILL
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DIALOG AGAIN BECOME A POSSIBILITY.

10. THE EMBASSY IS URGING RESPONSIBLE POLITICAL ACTION TO PROMOTE PEACEFUL CHANGE, BUT NO ONE IS WILLING TO TAKE THE LEAD. IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT THE MODERATE OPPOSITION, WHICH IS MUCH MORE PERVASIVE BUT LESS COHERENT THAN IN THE PAST, IS LARGELY FROZEN INTO A POSITION OF NON-ACTION (OTHER THAN CRITICISM OF THE SOMOZA REGIME, DEMANDS FOR HIS IMMEDIATE DEPARTURE, AND QUESTIONING US POLICY AS THE SAFEST COURSE. THEY AWAIT THE DEUS EX MACHINA EVENT SUCH AS A SECOND SOMOZA

HEART ATTACK, US OR FSLN DECISIIVE ACTION WHICH WILL TAKE THEM OFF THE HORNS OF THE DILEMMA, I.E. THEY UNDERSTAND THAT RESPONSIBLE POLITICAL INTITIATIVES TOWARDS DIALOG WOULD BE UNPOPULAR, AND REINFORCING THEIR INACTION IS THE THREAT OF REVENGE BY REVOLUTIONARIES

WERE THEY TO DO SO. THE MOST LPKELY NEAR TERM EVENT WHICH COULD UN-FREEZE THE POLITICAL SITUATION IS A RENEWED FSLN INITIATIVE.

1. AS LONG AS US POSTURE IS NEUTRALITY WHILE ENCOURAGING PEACEFUL DEMOCRATIC EVOLUTION (WHICH EMBASSY CONTINUED TO RECOMMENT); THERE SEEMS LITTLE THE EMBASSY WILL BE ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE SHORT TERM TOSIGNIFICATLY INFLUENACE THE CURRENT POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT TOWARDS A DEMOCRATIC, NON-VIOLENT SOLUTION. HOWEVER, THE EMBASSY WILL CONTUNUE TO TRY TO ACHIEVE THIS OBJECTIVE. IF, AS SEEMS PROBABLE , FURTHER VIOLENCE OCCURES, THE EMBASSY WILL CONTINUE TO BE LOOKED BY ALL NON-REVOLUTIONARY PARTIES TO STABILIZE THE SITUATION AND TO URGE THE GON TO AVOID REPRESSION.
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